

The year opened with no long-term plan for the war in **Iraq**, but plans were quickly formulated. Today, combat troops have largely pulled out of Iraq's cities, leaving the Iraqis in charge of security operations in urban centers. The president plans to withdraw combat troops by the end of August 2010, with a full withdrawal of American military forces by the end of 2011.

I agree with these deadlines and will continue to work with the White House and congressional leaders to make sure the drawdown is monitored closely, including the presence and activities of U.S. contractors.

Afghanistan, on the other hand, has become far more muddled. Violence has picked up and the security has become less stable. President Obama announced on December 1 that he plans to send 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan to increase security operations. This move concerns me very much, to a large part because I believe there are nowhere near enough resources being dedicated to stabilization and reconstruction activities.

Congress has not yet voted on this plan, and won't have an opportunity to until the Department of Defense runs out of money. The president pledged to stop using supplemental appropriations to fund the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but it looks like this troop surge will require him to continue that practice. It's a disappointing turn of events and one that I don't believe I will be able to support.

I am pleased with how the **Peace Corps** has been funded this year. After promising to double the Peace Corps within three years, initial budget requests were woefully low. I was able to convince House Appropriations leaders to provide \$450 million for Peace Corps, well above the President's \$373 million request. While the final funding bill included \$400 million, it still represented the largest single-year increase in Peace Corps history and the first time in 17 years that Congress put more money into the agency than the President requested.

I look forward to working with the president to continue to expand the Peace Corps. It was an exciting victory, and I'm looking forward to more great work from this wonderful organization that so shaped my life.

Cuba has also been an interest of mine, and we're slowly seeing opinions soften toward this country. After 40 years of policy that I believe have done nothing to budge Cuban leaders, travel rules this year were softened. We also saw a concerted effort by a bipartisan group of lawmakers to lift the travel ban entirely, as well as pressure to lift the overall Cuba embargo. The best way to influence a nation's people is through face-to-face contact, and I feel that opening the borders to Cuba is the first step.

I have not been satisfied with our government ability to perform **reconstruction and stabilization activities** in Iraq and Afghanistan. Last Congress, I passed legislation that would establish a new cadre of civilian experts in reconstruction and stabilization. This year, I played a key role in making sure that the civilian response corps was adequately funded and trained. I continue to have my concerns about our ability to rebuild broken societies, but at least we are beginning to build the institutional capacity to rebuild in tough, unstable environments.

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